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ship's sailing schedule to two days; longer stays can be arranged with authorization from island administrator Brian Baldwin. (For contact information see "The Basics" on page 132.) For those staying longer, lodging at island homes is possible for about \$35 a night, including three meals a day and laundry.

WHAT'S TO EAT This is a lobster island, but it's also an island for potato-heads, says Botha. The tuber, widely grown on the island, is the main ingredient in a variety of dishes featuring mutton, fish, or lobster. Even many local pastry recipes call for potatoes; some recipes date to the 19th century, when flour and sugar became available from passing ships.



Tristan da Cunha defines "remote."

READ IT AND LEAP The island is not the subject of many books, but *The Sun Never Sets*, Simon Winchester's exploration of the last vestiges of the British Empire, includes an insightful account of his stay on Tristan da Cunha.

TRAVEL TIPS To get to Tristan da Cunha you have to really want to go. Cruise ships sometimes stop at the island, but the luxury cargo liner RMS *St. Helena* is the only passenger ship that makes a scheduled journey to the island every year (usually in January), and berths are limited.

If you do actually go ashore, make the best use of your two-day visit by exploring as much of the island as you can on foot. The island is an outpost of natural oddities, with a variety of bird life and strange vegetation, which is best viewed at the higher elevations of Queen Mary's Peak, the island's dormant volcano. The climb to the top is steep but manageable – and memorable.

Tristan Potato Cakes

(Makes about 15)

Cook 1 pound potatoes. Mash. Combine with 5 ounces flour and a pinch of salt in medium bowl. Mix until smooth. (Do not add any liquid.)

Roll potato mixture out to ½-inch thickness. Use a circular cookie cutter or a wine glass to cut dough into rounds. Gather leftover dough into a ball, roll out again, and repeat the cutting process.

Pour vegetable oil into a heavy large skillet to a depth of about ½ inch. Heat oil over high heat until very hot. Carefully add dough rounds to skillet. Deep-fry until golden brown. Using a slotted spoon or spatula, remove cakes; drain on paper towels. Repeat until all dough rounds are cooked. Serve with sweetened cream or jam, if desired.

IslandWise

Trail Notes

A working vacation on a California Channel Island combines service and a smile.

by Tony Gibbs

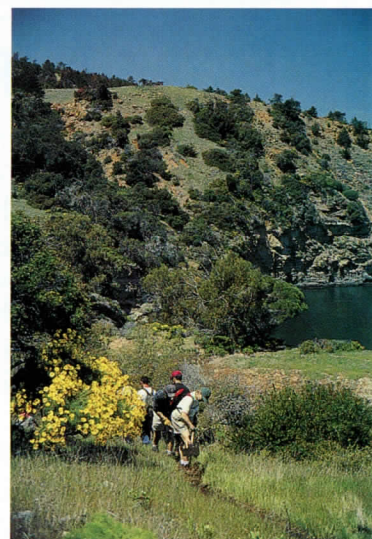
UP AHEAD, THE HILLSIDE trail cuts across a steep meadow. Some stretches have been overgrown, others simply erased by drifted sand or what look like the result of demented rototilling – the work, actually, of feral pigs. But behind me the same path is crisply edged, its freshly scraped surface the color of dark chocolate.

The transformation is the work of a dozen stooped figures in a straggling line. One lops encroaching tree limbs with a pair of oversize shears. Two or three are armed with a Pulaski – a long-handled tool with a head that's half pick, half ax; the sort of implement you might expect to find littering a medieval battlefield. Most of us are wielding a McLeod, a cross between a hoe and a rake designed, like the Pulaski, for fighting forest fires.

A stranger coming upon this sweaty, dusty group might reasonably assume it was part of some minimum-security prison program. In fact, the laborers here are not only eminently respectable citizens, but they've paid several hundred dollars (plus travel

expenses) to be here for a week swinging McLeods under the springtime sun, rehabilitating a trail that others will enjoy.

The trail itself runs a couple of hundred feet



Laure-Anne Barbour

Neatness counts: Vacationers reclaim a path on Santa Cruz.

above the shore for about two miles, between Prisoners Harbor and Pelican Bay, two of the most popular anchorages on the north side of Santa Cruz, largest of the eight Channel Islands of California.

Some 25 miles to the north, across the Santa Barbara Channel, haze hides the Southern California coast, and the mountain range beyond is but a faint shadow, halfway between conjecture and perception.

Here on the island the platoon of workers is as cross-sectional as the cast in one of those World War II action movies. Among our number are (in no particular order): a plumber from Brooklyn, a lawyer (recently

retired) from Southern California, a husband and wife from Minnesota (recently farmers and now deliverers of specialized vehicles, from RVs to armored cars), a Silicon Valley headhunter, an electrician from Sacramen-

to, an army dentist stationed in Tacoma, a former teacher, and a retired rancher and horse trainer.

What they have in common is membership in the Sierra Club, which offers what it calls "Service Trips"

— week-long, pay-as-you-work excursions, mostly in parks and public lands, that involve revegetating overused areas, mapping archaeological sites, assisting wildlife researchers, and (as here) building and maintaining trails.

The attraction, as more than one trip veteran has told me, is the opportunity "to give something back" — to offer a kind of practical thanks for nature's marvels — marvels that the volunteers get to experience first-hand in such striking places as Puerto Rico's El Yunque tropical rain forest, the Grand Canyon, Vancouver Island's Forbidden Plateau, and the Boundary Waters of Minnesota.

For each trip the club supplies a leader and sometimes a cook. Our leader — part coordinator, part overseer, part counselor, and part cheerleader — is Terry, a radiology technician with a cheerful, outgoing personality perfectly suited to her job.

Terry is complemented on this trip by our cook, Laurie-Ann, a slender, young trip junkie who has found herself virtually the only vegetarian in the group. A less forceful personality might have buckled under the task of selling a table of committed carnivores on the delights of veggie burgers. It's a tribute to Laurie-Ann's skill as a cook that she has been able to satisfy so many alien appetites while herself putting in a full day of trail clearing.

THE WORK DAY BEGINS early with a communal breakfast, after which the workers assemble their lunches from a smorgasbord

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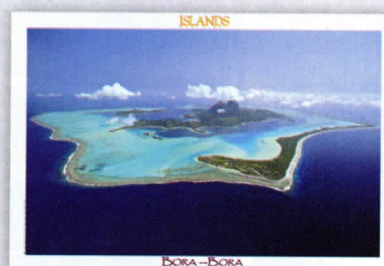
spread; the selection could only be called eclectic, ranging from jelly beans to carrot sticks to sandwich makings. Very little of it – thank heaven – is the kind of virtuous, gray, tasteless paste I associate with vegetarian trail food.

Because the old ranch where we are quartered is a good two-hour hike from the trailhead, we're driven there by Terry in one of the ranch's elderly trucks. Now, in April, the lower hillsides are still gently green, a self-effacing background for red monkey flowers and yellow coreopsis. But the winter's rains (light this year) are effectively over. In another couple of weeks the flowers will fade and the grass will begin to dry; by July the slopes will be a panorama of browns.

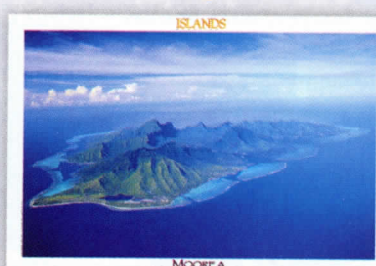
The unsurfaced road hemstitches its way next to (and sometimes through) a stream, dodging cantaloupe-size rocks. Along the way, Terry's frequent gear changes are accompanied by an obligato of ribald comments on her driving. (Coming home in the afternoon, the troops are more subdued: tired, dirty, yet uplifted by a spirit of teamwork that increases perceptibly as the rehabilitated trail unrolls behind us.)

The work itself is scarcely rocket science, the kind of thing that you can do while conducting a conversation (slightly breathless) with whomever happens to be working next to you. What interests me is the way my colleagues' personalities express themselves in their individual sections of trail: Our group might, I decide, be divided evenly between the live-and-let-livers, and

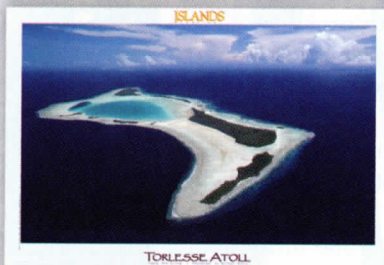
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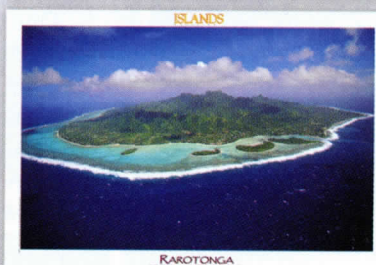
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the scorched-earth faction, the latter group including our ex-lawyer, who wields his oversize hedge clippers like the angel of death.

When we return to camp, there's a well-mannered but nonetheless intense race for the one shower, the theory being that the first three users get all the hot water. Only after we've been on the job for three days does our plumber discover that, in fact, there is no hot water, beyond what has been warming in the pipes during the day, a revelation that brings only amusement.

Sumptuous as they are, Laurie-Ann's dinners are really only the curtain-raisers for the climactic event of each evening: the team Trivial Pursuit contest, played by most, with the rest of us kibitzing. In a matter of minutes the day's spirit of refined co-operation dissolves into intellectual fang and claw, with shrieks of triumph or dismay

16th century. An estimated thousand or so Chumash inhabited this 22-mile-long island, which they called *Limuw* – "In the Sea." They made their homes in a dozen villages, whose sites are now marked only by middens – trash dumps of shells and bones being investigated by archaeologists.

One of those villages lay near the east end of this trail, around Prisoners Harbor. It's a logical spot for human habitation; a stream has brought enough gravelly sand down from the island's hills to form one of the few real beaches on the island's north side. Though the harbor isn't as sheltered as some other coves, it was a place where the Chumash could launch and land their fragile canoes, which were sewn-together pieces of wood caulked with tarlike crude oil from seeps along the mainland shore.

In later centuries Prisoners Harbor continued to be a favored anchorage for anyone landing on Santa Cruz, including a bunch of convicts whom the Mexican authorities dumped here in 1829.

After living sparsely on the land for a few months, the prisoners (so the story goes) built rafts and returned to the mainland, leaving the name behind.

Later arrivals included yachties, winemakers, sheepherders, ranchers, and the U.S. Navy, which still leases a hilltop above China Harbor. In 1978 The Nature Conservancy began to purchase the western 90 per-

cent of Santa Cruz, and it's attempting to restore the landscape to something close to its pristine state.

What's curious is that relatively few visitors to the island (mostly those who



Ready for visitors, a trail marker points the way.

come by sailboat) seem aware of this trail, which the conservancy has laid out to display the island's assets. Aside from spectacular views and an opportunity for modest exercise, it also passes a cross-section of the island's vegetation, some of which is endemic to the Channel Islands or even unique to Santa Cruz.

Such residents as island manzanita, Santa Cruz island ironwood, and three kinds of buckwheat are readily identifiable to the volunteers, each of whom has been given a copy of the conservancy's trail guide. No pamphlet is necessary for spotting the island jay, larger and bluer than its mainland relative but just as clever: After tracking our group all morning, from tree to tree, the jays immediately move in when we take our lunch break.

TWO AND A HALF DAYS after the first McLeod bit into the ground, we've fin-

ished the trail. Pelican Bay, our end point, is both more sheltered and more beautiful than Prisoners, but the only place for boats to land is on a pitted rock shelf, which contains a number of low-tide pools. The pools' inhabitants – barnacles, sea moss, tiny crabs, lots of juvenile sea urchins, and a few abalone – are the hit of the day, and the undisputed star is a sea anemone that ambitiously tries to ingest one of our worker's fingers.

A long time ago St. Francis observed, "it is in giving that we receive." The tide pools are only one of dozens of rewards gleaned in a few days' labor. New friends are high on most volunteers' lists of repayments, as are a renewed sense of closeness with the chain of being, the satisfaction of helping to provide a natural delight for others to enjoy...the list goes on and on, much of it provided by serendipity, the best kind of gift. ♦

Contributing editor Tony Gibbs spends his free time cruising California's Channel Islands.

The Second Time Around

In a quiet corner of Fiji, a confirmed island-lover shares his passion with visitors.

By Morris Dye

EVERYONE

who ever entertained the notion of trading life in the modern workaday world for

For a catalog of Sierra Club trips, contact the club's headquarters, 415-977-5522. Information about access by ferry to The Nature Conservancy's part of Santa Cruz Island is available from Island Packers, 805-642-1393. Visitors arriving aboard their own boats need a landing permit, available from The Nature Conservancy of California, 213 Stearns Wharf, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, 805-964-7839. For more information on the island: contact Santa Cruz Island Foundation, 805-963-4949, www.scifoundation.org

rending the night air until the last bit of pseudo-knowledge is plunked down.

ON A SUPERFICIAL LEVEL, the part of the island where the coastal trail runs probably looks much as it did when the Chumash Indians lived here, long before the Spanish arrived in the